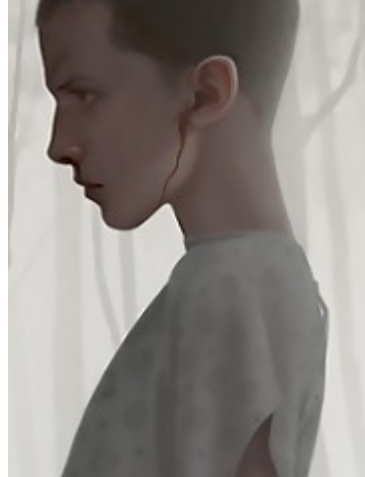




Even Stranger Things by zzetta13

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Summary: Hawkins Indiana, a peaceful place? Well only to the naive. There were things going on in this town that even the people who were supposed to know, didn't. Joyce, Hopper, Eleven, and maybe 10 others knew. Still, they were just small fish in a big pond (weren't there folk on the Titanic that knew that the ship was aflood. Still, did that keep it from sinking? Save yourself...

1. Chapter 1

Even Stranger Things: Chapter 1.0

Author's note: attempting to create a bridge, a frame-work between season 2 of ST & season 3 of ST. There is no season 3 visible for this television show yet. I'm sure that there is one in development. Anyway, this is purely a fan driven creation designed to fill in the gap, span a little time before we get the next season. Hope readers enjoy, and see it for what it is. Thanks for looking. Z

***** ***And So, We Start*** *****

Was she protected, of courses she was protected. She wouldn't have let Morris drive her out here, out in the middle of nowhere if she hadn't been.

Even still, her mind was already registered. It was concreted that nothing would happen. She would not allow her date to do certain things, things in which he thought that he might have a chance at doing (she hated to break the news to him of how wrong he was)...

Tiffany Bain knew that there may be a certain "activity" on her date's mind. Still, she would maintain control. And, she would not let things cross a point passed that control. She didn't think of herself as a tease, but she also didn't consider herself an "easy target". Still, people in the small town of Hawkins Indiana talked. It might be that they talked in quiet whispers and low tones, but still gossip got around. And, in a place like Hawkins High, small town rumors circulated the most.

She liked Morris, and she may even let him steal a kiss, kiss her neck, lick her ear-lobe (just as if he were licking the cake frosting from a spoon, just to say), but she wouldn't allow him to sample the cake. No, Tiff would not let things get that far.

Morris Carver, he was a good-looking guy, and he had tons of other girls memorized by his deep blue eyes. He was an athlete (playing for the Hawks High baseball team). Still, that didn't mean that she would let him hit a homerun. She would make sure that his count-down, his

launch eruption, remained delayed. She would make sure that his rocket remained on the launch-pad.

She may allow him to get to first base (maybe even second, being that this was their second date).

Kissing, hugging, and maybe a little intimacy (a fraction more), she might allow. However, beyond that was still a no-go. No shuttle launch, no blast-off from Cape Canaveral... she was sure.

Anyway, Tiff didn't want to arrive at school on Monday morning and find that the whole senior class knew of what had happened this Friday night.

No, Tiffany Bain was blonde, she was pretty, and she was eighteen, and too, so was her date.

Still, she didn't need any guy telling her that she was his "dream girl". She would throw-up if Morris told her that (she knew how a guy's minds worked).

Tiffany liked Morris. And she knew that landing him (as a boyfriend before graduation), might cement him as her prom date. She was the kind of girl that knew that she could have her pick, her pick of many (any) boy. Well, that wasn't exactly true. She knew that her looks could land her a fish, a good one...however, catching the winning trophy bass, in a tournament, well, that was something that she maybe couldn't do. She was pretty; however, there were other girls prettier.

Tiffany didn't want the quarterback of the football team (there were too many girls vying for Scott Taylor's attention). No, what she wanted, what was most important, was meeting and dating a good guy, someone that she could sit with (after a long day at school), and share the sunset.

Morris was a good guy, and too, he was a good catch. Tiffany considered the thought when he had asked about taking her out into the woods. She had planned for this. There was a "lover's lane" west of Hawkins, and east of Hawkins too. However, the one west was more secluded, more private. If they were going to go out into the

woods, this night, she opted for the more private place.

Anyway, here they were, driving down a westbound road leading out of Hawkins. It was already dark, and as Morris drove, he talked, and he had pulled out a bottle of red wine (*So, this was his plan*).

Tiffany smiled, she actually giggled inside. Of course she knew what he was attempting to do. Still, she felt that she could handle a cup, or two.

(Tiffany was no angel and she didn't want to be one. She had already sampled wine from her parent's liquor cabinet back home, unknown to them of course, and her tolerance for drinking was better than Morris might think...anyway...)

Here they were, driving along whenever her date suddenly turned onto a side street, a street that she wasn't familiar with.

"Morris, where are we going?"

He turned and looked at her, and then grinned.

"There's a spot down here, a great location where you can see the moon just right. Want to see?"

Well of course she wanted to see, so she held her tongue. Still, she would keep a vigilant eye on the situation.

They drove for a few moments, past a couple of secluded homes and buildings, but soon the only light left was the illumination from the headlights of his truck.

Morris finally found a spot and pulled over. It was kind of a dirt road, a through-way that received very little attention from the county's maintenance crew. Tiff looked around.

"I thought that you said we would see the moon from here?"

She looked into her date's eyes, and even in the darkness she could see how richly blue they were. Morris thought quickly.

"Well, we can, it just hasn't gotten here yet. See that space there,

between the trees," he pointed, "it's the perfect place where that celestial body arcs across. Just give it a minute or two, or ten, and you'll see. And speaking of celestial bodies..."

Tiffany looked at him. However, she ignored his last statement.

"Sounds like you've been here before," she said. There was a pause...

"I have," he answered. "My brother and I sometimes go hunting out here. And sometimes the best time for that is at night.

"What about the neighbors?"

"What about them? Will Byers, you know that little geek from school; he, his mom, and his older brother live in the last house on the left, before we got here. They're used to hearing noises at night, strange noises. Screams and gunfire, and even moaning,"...this last comment he gave with a smile.

He leaned in closer to his date. He was fishing for a kiss and, Tiffany, well, she wasn't about to stop him. She had prepared herself for this part. She was agreeable, wasn't she? Their eyes closed and they were about an inch away from contact whenever the pretty blonde heard something. It was a sound like someone walking. Tiffany stopped...

"What was that," she questioned?

"What was what?"

"That sound, that noise. You didn't hear it?"

"Tiff, like I said, there are lots of noises out here. It is the woods you know. Creatures and critters and things that go bump in the night. And speaking of bumping..."

"Morry I'm serious. I heard something. Will you go out and check, or not...? Does Sheriff Hopper come out here?"

Morris smirked...

"That knucklehead...Yeah, he might come out sometimes. But usually he's drunk. He's got a cabin not far from here you know. A secret

cabin, or so he thinks, but the locals know about it. Anyway, with all the shit that's happened recently...UFOs, bigfoots, alien saucers and even stranger things, and people thinking that he's somehow involved...I think he's keeping a low profile. Wouldn't do him much good as Chief of the Hawkins PD to say that he's seen little green men. That's what my dad says anyway."

Morris again leaned in for that kiss which had been interrupted, and then there was another sound, and this time, he heard it as well...

END PART 1

2. Chapter 2

Even Stranger Things

***** **Chapter 2** *****

Up to this point...

It was Friday night, and Tiffany Bain and her date, Morris Carver, had ventured out into the woods near Hawkins, Indiana.

On her mind was a little romantic interlude. However, on his maybe there was something a tad steamier. Anyway, noises outside his vehicle had caused "the moment" to be disrupted. It was a distraction, a nuisance, a pain in his plan more than anything else. However, there was no need to panic, was there? No, there was no need for that, every sound heard out in the woods can be explained, right?

*****Things that go bump in the Night*****

Tiffany Bain had heard something walking around outside of Morris Carver's truck. The thing is, he had heard it too.

(At this moment all thoughts of watching the moon, and maybe having a little private intimacy, were forgotten. Still, to get back to square one, Tiff had asked Morris to step outside and check)

He had been a little reluctant at first. There were possums and rabbits and other creatures that roamed around the woods at night (why was she so spooked?). Those critters didn't scare him, but what did were skunks. Not that he really had any fear of the little critters...however, what worse way to ruin a romantic tryst than to be baptized by a skunk?

Anyway, his first attempt to identify the noise (without exiting his vehicle), was to roll his window down and look outside.

There was a full moon out, and it was just beginning to pass the spot between the trees where Morris had said it would, so he hadn't lied about that. Its illuminated glow lit up the area somewhat, so it wasn't totally dark.

He looked around but saw nothing. He turned back to his date.

"It's probably just a rabbit or raccoon, or something. I don't want to get my boots muddy."

This did not sit well with his date. Tiff was not impressed.

What if Chief Hopper was out there, snooping around? Tiffany knew that she had only come out here for a kiss. However, if it had been a magical kiss, she may have been willing to let her guard down, and also, be coaxed into doing a little more.

"Would you just go...make a walk around the truck, for me, please?"

How could he argue with that? Morris stepped outside and strolled around to the back of his truck. He whispered a little something to himself that he knew she wouldn't be able to hear.

"I'd better be getting more than just a kiss for this," he spoke, softly.

At that moment he saw a rabbit scamper across the dirt embankment (twenty feet away). It had moved exceptional fast, as if it was trying to preserve its life, trying to evade something. In the dim moonlight he grinned.

"Well, at least it's not black, with a white stripe running down its back," he chuckled, but then he heard something else. It was a grunt, a groan, a rumbling deep down in the back of the throat, and, he could tell that this was something big. Not only could he tell that, but he instinctively realized that this growl, this rich bravado, was something he'd never heard before. It was unique, undefined, and it was scary.

Morris quickly returned to his truck. All thoughts of anything, anything other than starting his vehicle and making a retreat were lost to the darkness.

***** **Scared** *****

"WHAT IS IT," Tiffany asked?

Just the sight of her date acting in such an odd manner had caused

the young girl to pitch into high alert.

Morris didn't speak. He was too busy fumbling in an attempt to insert his key into the ignition.

Precisely at that moment Tiffany heard something approaching the vehicle, and it was coming fast. Just the sound of its heavy tread sent a ripple of fear racing up her spine. And then it happened...

There was something at her window. It was big, ferocious, and it was trying to get in. It was trying to get HER!

In a moment her eyes went wide. She let out a scream that could have busted someone's eardrums. However, it was drowned by the scream coming out of Morris's mouth.

She had turned away from the window, not wanting to see the thing. She screamed again.

"START THE FRIGGING CAR!"

Looking at his face, into Morris's eyes, Tiff could see that they were the size of the moon.

She didn't want to, but sometimes we just can't help ourselves. She had to turn, had to look that the thing trying to get at her. She swiveled her head around and viewed the window.

She couldn't see much of the face, there was a hand pressed against the window, and it seemed to encompass the entire frame of the glass. It was pressed flatly against the surface and she could see the outline of webbed fingers with claws. Still, peering up past those fingers she could see eyes, the eyes of the devil. They were red, glowing, and seemed like scarlet coals. Eyes looking to devour her soul.

Within the matter of a second the paw was removed and in its wake was left a smear, a smear of the slimy ooze. It seemed to drool down the window in a disgusting manner. It was repulsive. However, within the blink of an eye the hand was replaced by a face. Although it was obscured by the slime, the face was something Tiffany had never witnessed before. It was horror, danger, a nightmare come

alive. And it was a mere quarter inch from being inside with her.

She screamed again, at the top of her lungs, and in that instant Morris slipped his key into the ignition and started the vehicle...Still...

...Before the young athlete could shift it into drive (reverse, or anything other gear rather than park), the creature had made its way around to his side. It reached through the open window and grabbed him. Morris released the air from his lungs. The face of his mother, father, and siblings, flashed before his eyes.

He grabbed the beast's arm. He could feel the claws ripping into his shirt. He could sense the desire the beast had to pull him out of the window and devour him alive, right outside of his truck. Things seemed to move in slow motion at this point. The noise, the intensity, the actual blur of reality, all became distant.

Morris was able to get a grip on the creature's arm. He could feel scales and even fur. He pulled with all of his might. He fought for his life until he felt the thing release its hold. In a second he slammed the shift into "R", and then he smashed the pedal to the floor.

Tires spun and mud bathed the undercarriage. The screaming hadn't stopped, but it was now joined by the sound of an engine roaring to its max.

Morris drove in reverse fifty feet before making a maneuver that only stuntmen in Hollywood were known to do. He spun his truck around, and then smashing the gas pedal violently to the floor he sent the vehicle forward. The maneuver spun him off the road. He ended up next to some trees and bushes on Tiffany's side. However, he didn't stop.

Hearing the scratching of branches, as they streamed along the length of his truck was of no concern. What he wanted, what he prayed to God for, was to get out of there alive. He and Tiffany...

***** *Sheriff Hopper* *****

It was 11:46pm, and Jim Hopper had just laid his head down to rest.

He needed a good night's sleep. The bizarre things (which had happened over the past few months in Hawkins) had left him tired and empty. He needed sleep, deserved it. That or retirement. Actually the later seemed more favorable, but it was a long way off. Just at that moment his radio again to crackle, he let out an (expletive). He reached over and keyed the mic.

"Sorry Chief, for the disruption, just received a call-West Hawkins. There are two teens at Millie's Burger Box, seems they've been attacked."

Hopper thought for a second before answering.

"Dammit Flo, I was in the middle of a dream, a really good one. Me and Wonder Woman were about to do it. Do you know how many dreams it's taken me to get that far?

He heard a laugh.

"Wonder Woman (?), actually I wonder how that ever happened?" she giggled. *"Never mind, I don't want to know. Anyway Rowan's County youth is more important, don't you think?"*

There was a pause...

"Yeah I guess. Wake up Calvin or Phil. Let them handle this. They're law enforcement too in this county."

"Chief, I think it's a little more involved than that. Sounds like something really weird happened."

There was a moment of silence. If there was something Hopper knew about Hawkins now is that if someone made a claim of something weird, than maybe it shouldn't be ignored.

"Okay, wake them both up. Tell them to meet me at Millie's."

"Will do boss," dispatch said.

Hopper then looked at the clock. It hadn't even reached 12:am, which meant that it was still Friday. Friday the 13th.

"Rise and shine," he said. And then he stood up and began putting on

his pants.

END PART 2.

3. Chapter 3

Even Stranger Things 3

***** *Getting Answer?* *****

Sheriff Hopper pulled his vehicle up and parked right outside of Millie's Burger Box. He looked around. It was past midnight now, and there weren't any folk around. That was a good thing. He noticed an older model pick-up truck parked several feet away, and, in the hazy blur of the moonlight he thought that he could see scratches running along the passenger side. And he also could see that the window was a smeary mess. He didn't concern himself about that at this time.

Chief Jim Hopper considered himself a small town sheriff, and small towns were supposed to be peaceful and calm...weren't they? They weren't supposed to have things happen, things that could cast them into the national spotlight. So far they'd been lucky. Hawkins was still flying under the radar. Most major news media outlets weren't interested in small town crime, disappearances, or even murder. And too, Hopper supposed that the town was receiving some help from an outside source (somebody or something, wanted to keep this as quiet as possible).

Anyway, with the closing of "Hawkins Labs" (*the secretive and modest company which seemed more now to have been a covert government operation*), the "incident" which had taken place had been quickly and quietly covered up. He still didn't know who had been in charge. Although it was said to have been run by the DOE (Department of Energy), Hopper had ideas that the military was involved. Still, he didn't need this...he had his own demons to deal with.

Standing next to his Chevy Blazer he looked around for his deputies Powell and Callahan. The two were nowhere to be seen. He gave a little grunt (*well, he did live closer to Millie's than they did, so he could have gotten here quicker*). He headed up the steps and into the diner.

Millie's Burger Box was an all-night diner. A food-stop which catered to truckers, but in reality, anyone who came in could get a burger or other eats.

Hopper walked in and heard the little bell on the door chime. There were a couple of truckers inside. Both looked up and glanced at the sheriff, but then returned to their meals. Millie herself was standing behind the counter.

Hopper was about to say something whenever she made a motion for him to remain quiet, and, to come closer so to the counter so that they could speak in private. Hopper approached the bar.

"Hey Chief," Millie said aloud, but then coax him to lean forward a little.

"Yeah Millie, what is it?"

"I've got a couple of kids in back, and they're frightened out of they're wits. With all of the strange things that have happened around town lately, folk disappearing, and that unsolved murder of Benny Hammond."

Hopper's eyebrows lifted. Millie eyeballed him. She gave him a look which suggested that she was nobody's fool.

"Yeah, I know that it was listed as a suicide, but I knew Benny. We were competitors, but in a friendly sense. He wasn't the type of person to take his own life. Anyway, those kids came in all crazed, talking of monsters and stuff. I didn't want them scaring away my customers."

"Where are they now?"

"I put them in a booth in back," she said, "I told them that I would contact their parents but I called you first."

"I'll go talk with them," Hopper said.

***** **Moleman** *****

Chief Hopper made his way to the back part of Millie's diner. He spotted two teenagers, a boy, and a girl. They looked up and he could see that their faces' were as pale as ghosts. He sat down in the booth with them and secretly pushed the button on a tape recorder that he had concealed within his coat pocket. He had also brought a

clipboard with a couple of blank documents, so that he could take their statements.

"Hey kids," he said, "I hear that you've had a little excitement tonight."

Neither of them laughed, nor did they smiled. Hopper could see that his comment hadn't helped to lighten up the situation.

"OK then, let's get down to business," He said. He pulled out a pen so that he could take notes. "Let's start with you son."

For the next several moments Hopper jotted down details of what had happened, first with Morris, and then Tiffany. At no point did he laugh, or make fun (having his own weird experiences had taught him not to discount those of others).

Anyway, the notes he took were sketchy and vague. They could easily be dismissed, or construed into something more believable and plausible.

Morris described the creature as a "*Moleman*".

"Moleman..." Hopper questioned? "I don't know that it was a Moleman...Seems to me that that doesn't fit the description."

"Well what was it then Sheriff," the boy asked?

"I don't know. We'll take it under investigation."

The two teens looked as if they weren't totally happy with his answer. It seemed that they wanted action, and they wanted it now. Hopper looked at them.

"Who else knows about this," he asked?

"You...and Miss Millie a little bit. But that's all."

"OK, let's keep it that way. You can't tell your parents about this. You can't tell your friends or schoolmates. And you can't tell the town newspaper "The Hawk Eye".

They both looked at him a little confused.

"Look, it's under investigation and we don't want to start a panic. If towns' folk hear about this then we could have a crazy mob running around out in the woods. Someone could get shot. Do you want that?"

It made sense, perfect sense.

"What are we supposed to do then? What about my truck, it's all banged and scratched up?"

Hopper thought for a moment.

"Well, I guess you'll have to tell your parents something, but say that you don't know what it was, which happens to be the truth. Refer them to me."

Hopper's radio began to crackle.

"Chief Hopper come in..."

"Go ahead Flo."

"Tiffany and Morris's parents are..."

"Tell them I'll meet them at the station."

"Can't do that Chief, they're already on their way to Millie's."

"10-4 Flo, I'll take it from here. What about my deputies?"

"Powell is out of town, but Callahan is on the way, should be there shortly."

"Roger."

Hopper looked at the teens.

"You can both go with your parents when they get here," he said, and then he looked at Morris.

"Your truck will have to remain. We need to collect evidence. I'll

have Tony tow it to the station and you can pick it up tomorrow."

Morris wasn't too happy about having to leave his truck, but what could he do?

END PART 3

4. Chapter 4

Even Stranger Things 4

***** *Weirdness Becomes Weirder* *****

Jim Hopper, Chief Law enforcer over the town of Hawkins, stood up from his interview with two local teens, Tiffany Bain and Morris Carver. Both had been witness to some kind of abomination in the woods, or so they claimed.

They seemed a bit calmer now, having spoken and receiving confidence from Hopper (*However, it would be a long while before either one was ready to venture back into the woods*).

Hopper had asked them to return with him back into the main part of the diner. But then, after rounding a corner, the sheriff was met with a surprise. He was startled to see a couple of new faces. Two new customers had come into the diner.

The truckers were gone. However, there were two men dressed in suits inside now, and they were sitting at the counter on barstools. Millie was before them and in her eyes Hopper could see apprehension. The man closest to the sheriff stood and began walking towards him.

From behind Hopper gave the two students direction. He whispered...

"Go out onto the porch and wait for your parent's. Tell them that I'll talk with them in the morning...once this all gets stowed away."

The two did as they were told. The man approaching was about to say something. However, before he spoke he noticed Hopper with a clipboard in his hand. He allowed the kids go, giving them only a smile as they passed him. Once they'd made their exit the other man gave a moment and then followed. Hopper was about to make his exit too, whenever the man inside stood before him.

"Good morning Sheriff," he spoke, "we've heard that you've had some unusual happenings tonight."

"And you are...?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," the man flipped his jacket open. There was a bright shiny badge pinned to the inside of the liner.

"I'm Agent Grainger and my partner is Agent Sullivan. We were returning home, from a conference in Indi whenever we were rerouted here. We were asked to take a look. Do you need any assistants, any help? I see that you've taken notes, can I see them?"

Hopper hesitated for a moment. Although the guy presented himself as an authority, what agency did he represent? Still, denying him access to his notes Hopper surmised, may be trouble, was it really worth it?

Jim Hopper knew that there was nothing within the statements he had taken that were miraculous. Everything could be explained away (or discredited if need be). He handed the clipboard to the agent.

"Be my guest. Probably just a wild hog or something...just some animal looking for something to eat," Hopp spoke, attempting to minimize his findings. The man didn't answer. He was too focused on reading the notes.

(At this point Hopper was wondering how these guys had gotten here so fast. And, how they had even known about the incident...?)

And then in a flash it occurred to him. He received a revelation. These guys had responded so diligently because the emergency call from Millie to officer dispatch had been intercepted. Their phone calls were being monitored.

It all made sense now. Hawkins Laboratory may have shut-down, but the presents of these individuals spoke volumes. The government wasn't through with the town yet.

The Chief had been hoping that the event (at the laboratory) was over, over and done with. He had set his mind that it was all behind them now. However, maybe there was some residual, some after effect that still lingered. That was flat scary, waking up from a nightmare only to find that you were having a nightmare of a nightmare. This didn't seem to be

going away)

"Hey Chief..." Hopper heard someone announce from the doorway. He looked over and saw Deputy Callahan standing there. "What's up," his officer inquired?

"Can you excuse me," Hopper said to the man standing before him. "I need to bring my deputy up to speed."

***** *Yepper it's Gone* *****

It was approaching 2am now, and in a matter of a few minutes Hopp saw headlights pulling into Millie's parking lot. He assumed (and he was correct in that assumption), that it was Morris's and Tiffany's parents.

He saw Agent Sullivan approach the new arrivals, and then, exchange words with them. Soon those residents loaded into their vehicles and left. Hopper then returned his attention Agent Grainger (he had asked Callahan earlier to talk to Millie).

"Well Chief...looks like you have things under control. My partner and I will leave you to your investigation. Have a good night," Grainger spoke.

However, just before exiting the agent looked back over his shoulder.

"Oh, if for some reason something odd does come up, give me a call. Miss Millie has my information,"...and then he was gone.

"What a weirdo," Hopp said. He then joined Millie and Callahan at the bar.

"So Millie, you OK," the Chief asked?

"I guess so, those guys just creeped me out."

"That's understandable. Did he leave you a calling card?"

"Yes, he did." She reached over to the counter behind her and returned with a number.

"What do you make of it Chief. Do we have little green goblins running around out in the woods?"

Hopper looked over at Phil, but he didn't smile. Callahan could see that the sheriff was taking this matter seriously.

"OK, what you want me to do," the deputy asked?

Hopper, still looking at the card, gave his instructions.

"Morris's truck is still outside. We still need to get the evidence. There's a sample kit the in back of my blazer. See what you can gather. There's are some long scratches along the passenger side and the window has some kind of gooey residue on it. Check the driver's side too. And then call Tony and have him haul it down to the station."

Callahan left and Hopper continued to view the card.

"What kind of government agency allows their (people) to hand out cards?"

"Beats me," Millie replied.

In less than three minutes Phil returned through the door.

"That was quick," Hopper said eyeing his deputy. "Phil there's no way you could have..."

"It's gone Chief."

"What?"

"Looks like the whole truck has been wiped-down...totally cleaned!"

END PART 4

5. Chapter 5

Even Stranger Things 5

***** *Exploring Jim Hopper* *****

Sheriff Hopper hated El. Well actually, he didn't really hate her...It was just that she made him feel, well, she made him feel guilty. She reminded him of someone, someone from his past, a relative, and too, she reminded him of his faults, his failures.

Jim Hopper had lived a long life before coming here to Rowan County. A life where he had made some mistakes (mistakes that he had come to regret, and also, that he'd hoped to forget), but doesn't everybody?

He wasn't about thinking of what he had left behind, but rather, about the future. He had wiped clean the slate of his past, and as a result, had come to Hawkins with a clear conscious (he could start anew. *Still, what he hadn't reckoned was that, once summoned, a demon will not let someone loose so easily from their grasp. It will follow wherever you go*)

Hopper's demon was his drinking. It had been a problem before and it had returned. It was a demon, a stumbling block which had plagued him, a bit ago, and now it was creeping up upon him again.

Jim Hopper was now the Chief Authority over the town of Hawkins. He had run from the guilt of being a father (however, fatherhood is something that sometimes a man cannot escape).

Hopper had been given the task (by the ***Almighty***). He had been graced with becoming a parent (in what seemed to him as another lifetime, another place), and he had failed.

However, at this moment, at this time & place, he had been given a substitute, a girl, another girl. And ***she*** reminded him so much of someone, some person left in his wake.

Jim Hopper had come to Hawkins to forget so many things. And,

although he felt that he had grown (and had recovered), it had been years since he had felt such emotion.

Hopper had thought that he was all over with the excess baggage that he'd left behind. However, although God may have allowed him a reprieve somewhat, that didn't mean that he was cured.

Sheriff Jim Hopper was so wrong about thinking that.

With becoming the Chief of Rowan County, he had thought of himself as on vacation (*he had envisioned himself basking in the warm sunlight of a fading star, and retiring in ten years and reclining on a comfortable rocker on his back porch...only disrupted by an occasional fart, of which he had produced himself*).

Hopper had already mapped-out his existent of his next thirty-five years. He knew when he had been born, and he had contemplated his death. Still, it was the in-between part that he wasn't sure about.

Hopper knew a lot of things. However, he didn't know everything. Maybe he should have consulted with El on this matter. After all, her thoughts did boarder onto realms unknown, right?

Still, it kinda pissed him off seeking advice from an adolescent.

Hopper was "old-school", and it kinda pained him to think that someone else, someone younger knew more than he did.

He didn't even like to think of the idea...

END PART 5

6. Chapter 6

Even Stranger Things 6

Author's note: my thanks to the folk who have commented on this story (*and mostly to Phieill*). I appreciate you so much...Z

******When Nightmares Escape******

Sheriff Jim Hopper was about to pull his hair out (*and that wouldn't be a good thing considering that he didn't have that much to spare*).

Anyway, since the Chief Law Authority of Rowan County had been alerted about an incident, a certain happening which had occurred a few hours prior, he had been trying to put things into prospective.

Did he believe them, the two teens who had ventured into Millie's with a fantastic tale? Did trust their story? Well, for one thing he knew that they'd been drinking. He had smelled it on their breath. And, a few months ago he would have concluded their story to be false (*a creature coming out of the woods to attack people, come on! Even with the help of a full moon shining down, folk can still be mistaken*). Still, Hopper knew better than to think like that, at least now he did. Who would believe him if he ever tried to explain what he had seen?

Two teenagers in his town had been assaulted. And that was something that he couldn't, no wouldn't, allow. He would not let this fly. His soul, his complete self...wouldn't accept it.

Hopp had asked Deputy Callahan to accompany him out to the place where the incident had occurred. Maybe there they could find some evidence, something that remained?

(Hopper had totally been stunned by Callahan's reveal that everything on Morris's truck had been erased, wiped clean. This investigation was now entering a realm that was starting to implode his brain, and he didn't need that)

Yes, after the Hawkins Lab incident (an event which had been swept under the rug), a person needed to do some soul searching.

Hopp had hoped that everything would return to normal...(it was an event which now, should begin to fade away, fade into history...forgotten to the past, right?)

He knew that governments kept secrets (these were the 80ties, let's get real). Still, how much did they (our government) know, and, how much had their sub-contractor, running Hawkins Laboratory, inform them? Secrets upon secrets...since the end of WW2 it had become apparent that there was only so much that the *Big Cheese* (our government) would reveal to its population.

Anyway, this thing, this event (after the Hawkins' Lab affair), was above his pay-grade, or so he'd been told. And he accepted that. Still, when teenagers in his town were being scared out of their skins, well that did concern him, and yes, he would get to the bottom of it.

***** ***50 Shades of the Upside-Down*** *****

-Mad Scientists-

The "***Upside Down***"...what was it really? It was confusing, perplexing, and so weird in fact that even the people who knew, didn't really know.

(flip an egg over, or an omelet, or a pancake. You would think that you would know what to expect, but still, maybe this was the one thing, the one incident where things hadn't gone as planned)

Hawkins Labs wasn't about flipping pancakes, but they were about flipping reality. Polarization, magnetism, dark-matter, neutral matter, reverse matter...all of these things were subject to experimentation, to testing. If people really knew what scientist did...(what they were willing to take chances on), then the public would freak out.

A doorway had been opened, or in this case a hole had been dug. Either way, another world, another dimension, another place in time had been accessed. Still, in Hopper's mind that doorway had been closed, that portal plugged...right? Still, maybe this was a left-over, something that had come through and hadn't been found yet? Either that or maybe truly the portal had not been shut? Maybe there were gaps in the concealment of the foregone Hawkins Lab? Maybe there

were nightmares still slithering through?

Damn-it, Hopper didn't even want to think about that. He looked at his watch.

"5am," he thought. He'd been up a total of 24 hours already".

"There's nothing out here Chief," he heard Callahan's voice in the darkness.

"Phil was tired, Hopp knew it. Heck, he was tired too. Maybe it was time to call it a night. There was nothing to be seen, nothing to be collected," Hopper was thinking that maybe it was time to concede, it WAS time to go home?"

Still, at that moment his flashlight lit upon something...a mark in the ground, something he hadn't seen before. It was a print, a footprint.

Hopp squatted down, and in the scope of his flashlight he could see a foot-track. It was plainly outlined in the soil. And too, even in the dim light he could see that it was like nothing he'd ever witnessed before. It had three toes, and also deep claw marks.

Sticking his palm into the print he could see that the impression far out-measured his hand. Just then, standing a distance off, he heard Callahan question.

"Chief, did you find something?"

Hopped wasn't sure how to answer, especially to Cally. He knew that Callahan was one of the biggest gossips in town.

Hopper had a decision to make, and he had to be fast. Should he tell, or should he not? He knew about Bigfoot stories. He also knew that if the story got out, then there would be people coming out here, out into the woods, trying to hunt it down. Someone, some person was bound to get shot. He decided to keep this reveal to himself. He stood...

"It's nothing..." he said...in his most assuring voice. Still, he wanted to tell someone. Who might he be able to consult with that would know about these things," he pondered? The answer hit him like a ton of

bricks, *Eleven*.

Jim Hopper's "adopted" daughter was staying at Will Byer's house. Well actually, it was Joyce Byer's house. *(some nights those kids would get together and play games. They played "Dungeons & Bragons", or something like that. And he would allow El to go, just to let her out of the house...(as if he could really stop her).*

Anyway, she was staying for a sleep-over at Will's. And, if there was one person, anyone who could help him with this, it was the young girl he had taken under his wing. Maybe he would swing by Joyce's for a visit?

"Hey Phil, go ahead and go home. Get some rest. Come back to the station at about 3 (pm)," Hopper told his deputy. "I think that I'm going to head over to the Byer's house. Maybe stop in and see if Joyce, Will, or Jonathan heard anything...?"

Hopp paused for a moment...

"I might even get a fresh cup of coffee for my visit," he added. Just to conceal his true intent, "what do you think?"

"Sure thing Chief," Phil affirmed.

His deputy was not about to argue the point. Phil Callahan WAS tired, and he was wondering why things like this always happened on the weekend, on weekends when his friend, partner, and co-worker, Calvin Powell, was out of town? Still, when given a chance to go home and sleep, what employee would pass that up?

"OK Chief, I guess I'll see you this afternoon."

Jim Hopper smiled. He knew that it was time to get answers, and, he knew that Eleven was the person he needed to talk to.

Hopper looked down at the footprint, and then, with his right foot, he covered the area and than began applying pressure. He moved his shoe back and forth. He erased the print completely.

If there were secret entities who'd come into his town. Some government agency maybe...and they were hiding evidence. Then

why shouldn't he return the favor?

Two could play at this game. And Jim Hopper wasn't about to let strangers take over his town. He owned the townsfolk of Hawkins that much.

END PART 6

7. Chapter 7

Even Stranger Things 7

***** *Sin & Fog* *****

In the "Upside-Down", does the sun ever really shine?

After allowing his deputy (Phil Callahan), to go home, Jim Hopper started his vehicle and was ready to shift his Blazer into "drive". He had noticed a deep fog beginning to grow (around the woods). It was thick...rich, and too, kinda cliché (it was so like those old horror movies he'd seen as a kid).

He chuckled to himself.

"Yeah right, I suppose that some werewolf is about to come out of the woods now...rip my arm off, and then, eat it right in front of me. Either that or some huge-eyed alien bug will appear (out of the mist), hypnotize me with its big saucer-round eyes, and then take me back to its ship for...well, never mind that..."

(Hopp had seen many science-fiction television shows when he was younger, maybe too many).

Anyway, he had no fear of either of these things really happening. Still, with the bizarre events that had occurred the night before he felt that he needed someone's help in this matter(or at least a few answers). He needed assistants from an outside source, someone who had a tad more experienced in this kind of thing. Of course his immediate thought was (Eleven). Who better to help him, help him get in-sync with this crime. (if it truly was a crime, an attack, or an attempted abduction?)

Hopper knew that he had taken *Eleven* under his protection...*(however, he'd been under the assumption that the whole ordeal with Hawkins Laboratories was done, finished. That the weirdness of this situation was over).*

Hiding El from the authorities wasn't like he was hiding a drug dealer

or crazed hoodlum. No, this was a child, a young girl. She seemed to be someone who knew very little about the outside world. Hopp had recognized this immediately. He may have been a bad father before (the dereliction of his fatherly duties still haunted him), but now there looked to be a chance at redemption. Maybe helping this girl could relieve him of some of his guilt? With her young age and childlike manner it was easy for him to decide to keep her hidden. However, it wasn't until later, at his cabin, that he'd become aware her unusual capabilities. She had things, powers that scared him.

Hopper had lived a long life, and during that life he had experience many things. Still, he'd never come across someone like her. He knew that the men in dark suits had come here to find her. He also knew that any strange event that occurred they'd been ordered to debunk. They were going to want him to forget the spastic ramblings of teenagers, and he would, but only after he'd convinced himself that what those kids had reported was not true (he had been called things in his life. Actually, he had been called lots of things, all of them untrue, well most). Still, there was one thing that he carried still...and that was shame. Shame over not listening to a child whenever she spoke that he was not listening to her. He wouldn't make that same mistake again. At one time, he may have been a drunk, a deputy unfit to serve in a big city, but now, in this sleepy little town of Hawkins, he'd been able to do his duty and move up to the rank of Chief. He's been given a new opportunity. And this time he was determined not to fail.

Jim Hopper shifted his Blazer into gear. he was headed towards the Byers residence. He wasn't planning on dragging 11 into this situation (she had suffered enough already). Still, if he could gleam a hit from her, get an idea of what he might be facing, then he would be happy. That's all he wanted.

El may be a girl, a young girl, and her innocence would (no could), melt the heart of many a person who stumbled upon her. Still, innocents can be deceptive. Eleven was not as she portayed. She had influence over things. She was not the newborn bear cub. She was not the snugly little teddy bear wrapped in a blanket begging to be loved and cuddled. Her innocent may be real, but her ability to control things was also real. Maybe this is what Brenner was trying to

tap into?

In her outside world,...boys, love, and maybe the truth are just the things that a young adult are searching to find(*Brenner had told her many times that he loved her. That he cared for her, and that he would always be there. She understood that to be untrue now. He had lied*)

Still, It wasn't until she met Mike that she felt that she could sleep, could take ease. That she could lay her head upon a pillow and not worry about tomorrow. Living with Hopper was so different. He was so demanding, and seemed to be so angry all the time. Was he any different than the world she'd left behind, than Brenner? She struggled with the issue.

Eleven was just a girl, just like his daughter, but then, not like her. Hopper was torn. He considered that involving 11 would just be on a small measure. Still, what if things advanced? What if she could not be involved only on a surface level? What if anything, a new event, something he didn't know about pulled her back in?

There was no right or left, black or white, bronze or gold. What if El's link to the Upside-Down could not be avoided?

The question Hopper had to ask himself at this time was, would he be willing to sacrifice another daughter? He pulled up in front of the Byers residence. He could see that there was a light on, a light in the front room. However that meant nothing.

Dawn was just on the horizon. Still, with the thick woods around the Byers place, the forest wouldn't allow much of the early morning light to enter. It was still rather dark. Just at that moment he heard something tap on his window. He turned and saw that there was a shotgun pointed at his face. He froze. However, in a short moment he rolled his window down. He looked up into the face of Joyce Byers.

***** *Shotgun Totting Mama* *****

"Hey, are you out doing your duty or have you become a peeping tom?"

"Joyce I..."

"Forget it...," she laughed at him. "Com'mon inside...I'll put on a pot of coffee."

Joyce had never been a weapons type of woman. However, after what had happened with her home being attacked, Hopper had purchased her one, and he had told her to keep it handy. Seems she had taken his advice.

In a few moments the chief was inside and sitting at the kitchen table (Joyce knew that he was keeping El from higher authorities, and she had no problem with it).

There was a fresh cup of brew in front of each of them, and they sat for a moment just looking at each other.

"So, what brings you out to my neck of the woods," she asked?

Before answering Hopp took a sip from his cup.

"Because yours is the best..."

"What...?"

"Your coffee...it's the best. What did you think I meant?"

The two laughed together...and then he said...

"Actually I'm here for El. Where is she?" He suddenly got a sinking feeling, had she slept with the boys?

"You didn't let her sleep with...?"

Joyce smiled. She took her own sip of coffee.

"Mike, Dustin, Lucas and Will (?)...hell No," she replied, "just Johnathan."

Hopper's eyes grew really wide. Joyce began laughing.

"No really, she's asleep in my room and the boys are in theirs. I slept on the couch. It's why I heard you coming down the road. Hopp, you can trust me, still, what do you want with her?"

"I just need to ask her some questions. Is it OK? I think that there is something she can clear up for me."

Joyce arose.

"I'll go wake her," she said. "I hope that she isn't a grumpy-Gus, being awoken so early in the morning?"

The woman left, and Hopper spent the next few moments thinking, contemplating, considering his next move. In the matter of a minute he heard something behind him. He turned, and saw Joyce standing there, in the open doorway and she had an odd look on her face.

"What is it, what's up?"

"She's not there. She's gone!"

END PART 7

8. Chapter 8

Even Stranger Things 8

***** *Creepiest Before Dawn* *****

The forest looked haunting at this time, dreamy and surreal... She had noticed the whisper of fog snaking around the trees, and she didn't like it.

Fog hinted of bad things, bad things that could come, and maybe reach out and snap you up, hurt you. Fog was evil, and even in the Upside-Down there was fog. OK, maybe there wasn't fog, but there was mist. Still, fog/mist, what difference did it make?

Anyway, here she was, staring at the trees, their silhouettes casting shadows on the ground, or upon other trees. That frightened her. The movement of some of their branches looked like arms, arms with hands that had long bony fingers (and too, seemingly with a desire to reach out and grab a person, like her). Her eyes never looked away, just in case one of them actually tried.

The young girl wished that Mike was up, and they could talk. She didn't care if the other boys were awake, but if Mike was, then she would feel better. He always made her feel better.

Just at that moment she heard a sound coming from her left.

***** *Small Town America* *****

Jim Hopper and the rest of the people in the house had gathered on the front lawn (Joyce had awakened the boys and they had all come together to organize and to formulate a plan).

El, where was she, where had she gone? They divided up, and under Hopper's instruction, headed off into separate directions.

Jonathan, Dustin and Lucas headed into the woods across the street. Joyce, Will and Mike took the car and drove towards the highway. Chief Hopper, well he didn't need anybody to accompany him. He was a big, strong, man, and he could handle himself.

Anyway, the chief took his Blazer and headed back down the road he had just traveled (maybe he had missed her on his drive up?). They all had walkie-talkies so that they could stay in touch and communicate.

Hopper was thinking about El, but too, he was thinking about Joyce.

He remembered that she'd had a look of devastated on her face. He could see in her eyes that she was worried that he would blame her for losing the girl. Well, she was wrong. Hopper knew El. And he knew that if she didn't want to be controlled, then she couldn't be controlled. Not by any methods that he knew (maybe there was something Brenner had used?)

Anyway, all that Hopper knew, what he'd come to realize is, that what worked was to reason with the girl. Her mind was a mush of a mess, but she still maintained certain loyalties and feelings, feelings of doing what was right (Eleven had issues, mental issues, but then, Hopper understood the reason, perfectly).

He drove back down the way he'd come. He was wondering where she could be? He had a question brewing in his mind. Had the men in suits (at Millie's) found her, abducted her? Was she now enroot to another secret place, another laboratory that no one knew about?

...Was Eleven destined to remain a guinea pig, a lab rat, something to be used to satisfy the curiosity of others (scientist)? The thought made his stomach turn, he felt queasy.

"Son of a bitch!" he said aloud, gripping the steering-wheel hard (so hard that his knuckles turned white), he turned his vehicle around.

The feeling of failure began plaguing him again. He decided to use the walkie-talkie to make contact. To see if the others had come across anything.

"This is Hopper, anyone find anything?"

There came a response.

"This is JB, nothing yet. Just a bunch of spider webs getting in our hair."

Hopper chuckled.

"It will wash out," he said, and then after a pause he spoke again, "What about you Joyce, find anything?"

He waited, but didn't get an answer. Hopper began to get a little uneasy.

"Joyce...are you there?"

He heard the crackle of his radio.

"Sure Hopp, we found something, but it just turned out to be a big old dog looking for something to eat."

It did cross the Sherriff's mind that...*"maybe this is what the two teens had seen? Some big old hound looking for a hand-out..? Still, it didn't jive with the footprint he'd found."*

"OK, keep me informed," he spoke into the radio. He returned to the Byers' house.

Once in the driveway he thought of something, *"...there was still one direction in which no one had searched, and that was directly behind the house"*.

Joyce's place was surrounded by woods. It was the only place she could afford (in her current situation). Still, until a few months ago it had been peaceful and quiet. Barking dogs were the only sound heard at night, and the occasional screech of an owl.

Her two kids were good kids. Both Jonathan and Will had never given her any trouble, and they had good friends too. In fact, the whole town of Hawkins seemed an ideal place to raise a family (that is, until things seemed to have gone haywire).

Anyway, Joyce didn't like to ponder over the situation (if a person thinks too much it can drive them crazy). All she wanted was, to know was that her kids were safe. And they had a chance to grow up to become good, healthy citizens.

In her car, Joyce looked right and then left. She didn't see anything.

She could hear both Will and Mike calling out for El as they drove down the road. They were getting nothing.

She felt lonely, she felt like crying, but she wouldn't do it. Not in front of them.

***** ***Creature in the Woods*** *****

Jim Hopper exited his vehicle. He leisurely walked around to the back of Joyce's place (the sinking feeling in his gut never really going away). His thick beamed, heavy, police flashlight panned out in front of him. He scanned the forest.

The fog was coming in, the same fog that he had witnessed on his initial trip to the Byers' house. Still, fog was only fog; it didn't mean a damn thing. It did make the forest look a little eerie though.

He cast his light-beam back and forth. He was about to call out when he suddenly shined his light onto the back porch. There he spotted something...It was Eleven! And she was leisurely sitting in a chair, a porch rocker.

Hopper was floored. He felt both relief and anger at the same time. Hadn't she known that they had been searching for her? He walked over and put his right foot up on the top step going onto the porch.

"So, how was your night?" He asked sarcastically.

She looked over at him but didn't respond.

"So, you didn't hear us calling for you, wondering where you were?"

"No," she said.

"Look, you can't be doing this kind of thing, wandering off alone."

She looked at him.

"You're not my father, and you're not Brenner."

That hurt, at least one part of it did. Hopper let out a breath of frustration.

"You had everybody worried. You had Mike worried."

That seemed to work, that had been the right thing to say. Once he had informed her of the the Wheeler boy, then her face had changed. She dropped her head.

"I'm sorry," she said, and Hopper knew that it was genuine.

That was when he looked down at her bare feet, they were dirty, in fact they were caked in mud. He paused for a moment. He knew that El was a special girl, but was she also something else? Was she a shapeshifter? He dared believe it. However, it *was* something that he couldn't rule out.

Had El been the creature in the woods? Could she somehow transform herself? He knew that she capabilities, but how much did he really know about her? He decided not to pursue the idea, not at this time. He got on his walkie.

"Hopp to everyone...I've found her."

END PART 8

9. Chapter 9

Even Stranger Things 9

***** *Trust Issues* *****

El stood at the front window of the Byers' residence. She was looking outside, right out into the front yard. She watched as the illumination of a (new) day was beginning. The brightness of our star was supposed to bring forth clarity, focus. It was supposed to show us what was real...bring everything into the light.

The sun was just beginning to spread across the upper halves of the tall trees, its light, its orange radiance, reassuring anyone who saw it that it was going to be a good day.

The sun seemed so happy, so happy that its shininess alone could convey cheer. People should be convinced that it was going to be a good day, an awesome day. The sun was shining. How could something, anything bad happen? How could something go wrong when the sun was shining?

Even with the awesomeness of nature, combined with the spectacle brilliance of our solar star, Eleven wasn't looking to admire the sunrise, nor was she absorbed in the beauty of the woods this early morning. No, what she was doing, what she really focused on, was the face of a man in front of her, a man that she wasn't totally sure about. She was staring into the face, or rather the eyes, of Jim Hopper.

(but too, he was also looking at her)

Jim Hopper sat in the cab of his Chevy Blazer, both hands gripping the steering wheel. He sat looking straight at the girl he'd been trying to protect, attempting to keep safe, and he was a bit confused. He hadn't had to deal with this kind of "adult to adolescent" interaction in ages, or at least someone living under his roof. He was a bit rusty, OK a lot rusty. OK, a better description would be that he was totally oblivious when it came to handling a youngster of teen status, especially an adolescent girl.

Even back in the day his parenting skills would have rated him a D + ... He had tried to do better (he had even read a book once, for assistance, "Parenting Made Easy") within a week he was using the pages of that book as toilet paper.

Hopper's parenting abilities needed tons of work. Still, at that moment he wasn't thinking of parenthood. He was more trying to keep his facial expression as blank as a sheet of paper. He could see Eleven looking at him, looking into his eyes. Was she trying to absorb his soul?

Finding El sitting on the back porch, of the Byers residence, and too with muddy feet, he began to conjure up his own conclusions.

He had been looking for a creature walking (stalking) out in the woods, well this brought up new questions, questions that he wanted to get answers to. However, he didn't want to ask them in front of everybody.

Hopper didn't want to look like he was the bad guy, the mean old police sheriff.

Eleven knew what he was thinking, she knew his thoughts. And she didn't have to be a mind-reader to be able to see that.

Hopper couldn't hide his anger, his frustration. She could see it in his eyes. She knew that he was mad, that he wanted control, but he couldn't get it, not totally. So what could he do? He was in a bit of a pickle here, wasn't he?

Eleven had run off. She had disappeared leaving everyone in the Byers' household in a panic. Well that may be a bit of an embellishment, nobody had actually been in panic, but still, they weren't happy, not until she'd been found.

Anyway, after Hopper had found her, and the "search parties" had returned home, everyone had gathered on the front lawn. There was almost an atmosphere of euphoria.

(every person in that group knew about the Upside-Down. They knew that there were trials, things being tested, experimented (just as in every

county). There were things going on that only upper level sciences knew about. Still, shouldn't the government put a halt to some of that shit? We need to leave some windows left closed)

All of the Byers, and Dustin and Lucas too, were exceptionally happy to see her, but none more so than Mike Wheeler. He had been the first to rush in, run up, and give her a giant hug. She realized too that his hug had been stronger, and longer than everyone else's (didn't that mean something?).

Actually each one of them had hugged her, all of them save Hopper. She looked over at the man she'd been living with, but he made no attempt at showing her the slightest hint of affection. There was still a power struggle going on here.

(a child, an adolescent may do something stupid or bad sometimes. They might not be thinking straight when they put themselves, or others, at risk. Still, it is OK to be coarse with them, angered. However, they still need to be shown care. In Eleven's case, even Brenner had told her that she was special)

Hopper didn't have to love El, heck they barely knew each other, still, a simple smile, a grin, a soft touch or a whispered, "I'm glad that you're OKAY," would have been enough, would have sufficed. She didn't get that from him, she didn't receive anything from the Chief of Hawkins.

Getting into Hopper's mind, his emotions, was like crossing a barbed wire fence, actually, several fences. It could be accomplished, but only after receiving many cuts and lacerations.

Jim, although it was barely noticeable to others, kept folk at arm's length. He was standoffish, he was a loner. Eleven had seen that, but her own personality was much the same (so could she really be his judge?), a positive and negative may match up. However, two things that were much the same, so alike, would never match up. That's where trouble ensued.

El was young. She didn't understand that big, burly men may try to hide their emotions, sometimes. An Authority-figure, especially a Law Authority, kept their heart in a box. Showing weakness or

vulnerability wasn't something that they revealed so much. Was this Hopper?

Anyway, Hopper had wanted El to go with him, go back home. However, Joyce had stepped in.

"Hopp she hasn't eaten. I haven't made the kids breakfast yet...and I went to the store yesterday and bought eggos," Joyce paused. She could see that Jim was about to fall over from exhaustion...

"You need to go home. Go home and get some rest. You've been up all night and you can hardly keep your eyes open. El can stay with us. I will bring her back later. I will let her know that if she needs some "alone time" she can have it...she just needs to trust me."

Hopper didn't say anything, but Joyce could see that he was pondering over her idea. It was a good idea, he was thinking..."*Getting some sleep did sound appealing*"...he agreed. Joyce then offered that Jonathan could drive him home, but that's where the chief drew the line. He could drive himself home.

Chief Hopper was sitting in his vehicle now, about to drive away, but looking up he had seen El looking at him through the window. He had paused. He had been trying to reach this girl, trying to get through to her. To and get her to understand that there were not only bad things that happen in a laboratories, but there were also bad things that happened out in the real world.

The cosmos, the universe itself was filled with bad (and also good), things. He didn't know how to reach her, how to make a connection to her mentally.

Hopper knew that he had been a shit of a father, before, but he was trying to make up for it now. He just didn't know if he would be able.

The sheriff of Rowan County shifted his vehicle into reverse. He backed out of Joyce Byers' driveway. And with one last look at El, he shifted his vehicle into forward. He put his eyes on the road ahead, and headed home

END PART 9

10. Chapter 10

Even Stranger Things 10

******Girl Talk******

She watched...she watched as the man drove away.

El, didn't hate Jim Hopper, it was just that she didn't understand him. He could be a good person, and then all of a sudden, he would change, and he would not allow her do something that she wanted to do, watch television, go outside, or several other things. Not while he was away.

(maybe it was that she didn't understand that he was only trying to protect her)

"Honey, come sit with me." Eleven turned and saw Joyce Byers sitting at the table, alone.

"The boys have to clean up their room,' the older woman said. "With all of the pizza boxes and crumbs all over the floor, and the soda cans and the playing cards. They know they have to clean up their mess."

And then she added..."Just because I've had big monsters coming through my walls doesn't mean that I want to have little ones (mice) run across my floors."

El realized the joke, and a grin creased her lips.

Joyce noticed this. It was the first time she'd seen the girl smile.

Eleven was even prettier when she smiled. She needed to do it more, Joyce was thinking. However, Joyce also knew that the place El had been held captive, Hawkins Labs, was no paradise. It had been more like a prison than anything else. How could people like that do such things to little children? Yes back there, at that place, Eleven had been given very few reasons to smile.

The young girl joined Joyce at the table and the two spent the next few minutes becoming better acquainted. The older lady even gave El

some insight into Hopper. He wasn't a bad man, he was a good man, and he was just trying to help.

She did change the girl's opinion of him somewhat, but not completely.

A short time later the boys came in and Joyce fixed everybody something to eat.

After a long night of playing games, all of them were famished.

***** *Demon Spawn* *****

After breakfast Joyce set to cleaning the kitchen and Jonathan helped her. The rest of the bunch, Will, Mike, Dustin, Lucas and El, all returned to the room to decide what they were doing to do for the day. It was Saturday morning, and just like most kids their age, they wanted to fill the weekend up with as much adventure as possible (before having to return to school Monday morning).

"So, what's the plan," Dustin asked? "Want to play some more D & D?"

Mike looked at him.

"No, El doesn't like that game. It brings up bad memor...,well you know. I think we should spend some time outside. Give Will's mom a break from having four extra kids in the house," he advised.

Looking at Will, they all noticed that he was in agreement.

"OK," Lucas said, "so what do we do?"

"We can ride our bikes," Dustin offered. "Ride over to the old Buckner place. It's supposed to be haunted."

Mike, Will, Lucas and El all looked at him.

"Haven't you had enough of scary things," Mike questioned?

"What then?"

"We can ride our bikes over to the park and play some basketball on

the court."

"Yeah, but there's five of us," Dustin pointed out.

"We can pick up Max along the way."

"One of us can cut through the back yard and take the path down to Max's, it's a shortcut. And then we'll all meet up at the park."

It sounded like a good, solid plan, that is, until El voiced her opinion.

"I don't think that we should," she said. All four boys turned to look at her.

"What...why not?"

"El, if you're worried, then I don't think that you need to be. The bad guys in town have left. And even if there are some still around, a playground is the last place they'd think to look for a person that has your powers."

The three other boys agreed. They could see the logic in Mike's assessment.

Eleven didn't back down.

"No, it's just that I don't think that anybody should go through the back yard to Maxine's."

"Why...?"

"Because there's something out there...It's why I got up early and went onto the back porch. There's a thing, some kind of creature. That's the reason why Hopper showed up so early this morning. He wanted to ask us if we'd seen or heard anything, but with everything going on he became distracted and either forgot, or decided not to ask."

All four boys eyes got big around. They were looking for adventure and now it seemed...one had fallen directly into their laps.

"A creature," they almost voiced in unison?

"Yes."

"Well, what is it...a Demogorgon, a bigfoot, a killer clown?"

"I don't know what it is. I only sensed it. I could feel it roaming the forest looking for something."

Mike and Will were both put a little on edge by this information. However, Dustin and Lucas were less frightened. It was one thing to be caught off-guard, but quite another to be aware and prepared for something.

"So, the chief's looking for this thing," Mike asked?

El nodded her head in affirmation.

"Well then, let's help him out," Dustin suggested. "Let's help him find it." He looked into the face of every one of his friends. Not one had jumped in and agreed.

"Bad idea," Mike said. "We all know that this is dangerous, Will and El can tell you first hand. And we all know what happened at the school. Maybe we should let the right people handle this. The guys with guns."

So now there'd been a debate started.

"Yeah, but Hawkins only has a small police force, a tiny police department,. And, it isn't like those guys have a dragnet security system. What if this thing hurts somebody? gets around and breaks into people's homes...and eats them."

Dustin looked over at Mike.

"What if you go home later and find that your mom, dad, and two sisters had become a Happy Meal?"

He then looked over at Lucas...

"What if you find your little sister has been taken by a werewolf? They are known to abduct and eat little kids you know."

Dustin then looked over at Will.

"And you, you most of all should know that this thing needs to be contained. Your mom, your brother, do you want them to become victims?"

It was clever, a clever little ploy, one presented by their curly haired friend, but it worked.

Just at that moment there was a knock on Will's door.

"Boys...you in there? I don't think it's a good idea to stay bottled up in the house all day. Will, you and your friends need to come out and join the real world," Joyce said.

The thought did run through her younger son's mind.

"By real world mom, did you also mean the Upside-Down?"

He only thought it, he didn't say it out loud.

END PART 10

11. Chapter 11

Even Stranger Things 11

Author's note: I've messed a bit with true history in this chapter. It was just for fun, and because I couldn't resist. I hope that reader will forgive and still enjoy. Z

***** *Whistle Blowers* *****

"Should we tell her?"

Mike Wheeler looked over at his friend Will Byers.

"Should we tell your mother that there's something out there in the woods?"

Mike's question kind of caught everybody off-guard, everyone that was in Will's room at the time.

El, Dustin, Lucas, and Will himself hadn't really thought about it (heck it had only been a moment ago when they had learned from El that there may be something lurking in the woods). And so, they really hadn't thought of including anyone else in this (what they were now pondering over). The idea before was, that this past event in their town, was now over.

Hawkins Labs had been shut down and sealed off. It was forbidden to go there, it was taboo territory. Anyone driving by the place, any citizen, could see the big warning signs and the "Danger: Keep Out", notices, all posted along the fences.

There had been no official explanation given as to what had really happened. The "Higher Authority" had only hinted at what had taken place (seems they would let the town's population come up with its own ideas. Peoples' imaginations were far better at conjuring up freaky situations than what the government could provide. Even if someone did stumbled upon the truth, it would be just one of a hundred, or maybe even a thousand, explanations...No, it was better just to let people's minds go berserk)

Even the town's own newspaper itself "The Hawk Eye", had come up with the best scenario to keep people out. They had reported that it was a toxic spill (actually Agent Grainger had leaked this to the press). And with the "Three Mile Island" incident still fresh in folk's minds, occupants of the town were just happy to have been told that the incident was contained, and that it was well considered safe.

Anyway, there were only a few people in town that really knew what had happen at the labs, and seven of them were in this house. Some of the other townsfolk, who'd been involved, "The Whistle Blowers", had received death threats, and were told to keep quiet.

Hopper and Joyce had gotten together and decided that what they knew they should keep secret. They didn't want to get mysterious phone calls or pop-in visits from strangers. Those people could be almost as creepy as what they'd witnessed in the Upside-Down.

Hopper had gone home and gone to bed. He had told Joyce that he would be back at the station at about 3 o'clock. If she needed something before then, something none earth shattering, then Flo would be at dispatch, and there were a couple of other officers on duty.

Hopper fell into his bed. When he awoke he would take up again the investigation. Right now even looking at the hands on a clock was becoming blurry.

***** ***Spilling the Beans: Not*** *****

It was 2:30 in the afternoon and Jonathon Byers had hooked up with Nancy Wheeler to get a bite to eat at one of the town's local fast-food eateries.

The older Byers boy looked at the girl (sitting across from him). She was pretty, very pretty, he was thinking, and they shared lots in common (of course one being their brothers were good friends, and two, their own connection to the Hawkins incident).

Still, the question remaining was, where was their relationship going? Was it a star in heavens, or was it just an instance in time? Where would it end? Neither one knew, nor was either ready to make a

commitment.

At that moment two men in dark suits entered the diner. These two guys stood out. Not only because they looked pasty white, but because nobody in Hawkins, ever, never dressed like that on just a regular day.

If there was a funeral in town, a church service, or something like that, it would be understandable that heavy "suit and tie" would be appropriate for the occasion. However, roaming around Hawkins in a sticky, uncomfortable suit...nope, people just didn't do that.

They watched as these men approached other people in the cafe. And one of them, it seemed, would pull something out of his jacket and then show it. Could it be a photograph? Both Jonathon and Nancy could see folk shaking their heads in the negative (obviously they didn't know anything about anything of what they were being shown)

Then the two men noticed Jonathon and Nancy. They began advancing towards the young couple. The two Hawkins citizens made eye contact briefly, but both knew that they would not spill-the-beans, so to say. If these fellows were looking for information, then why hadn't they contacted Hopper, and the Hawkins Police department?

The guys walked up to their table. They were polite enough, but it was just a cover. The taller fellow pulled a photo from his pocket.

"Good afternoon," he stared, "my, there seems to be a lot of attractive people living in this town."

Neither Jonathon nor Nancy were falling for it.

He then said. "Let me introduce myself. I am Agent Grainger and this is Agent Sullivan, and we are looking for somebody, a girl. She's been snatched and we need to find her."

He showed Jonathon the photo. "Do you recognize this girl? Have you seen her anywhere? Her family is really worried."

Jonathon looked at the picture (for some reason he knew instinctively, not to glance up at Nancy. That would have been a dead

give-away that he knew this person). He kept his eyes focused on the picture.

"Nope, can't say that I have," he said (as convincing as possible).

Grainger then turned the photo around and showed it to Nancy.

"...and what about you Miss, have you seen her?"

Nancy looked...she studied the photo intensely.

"Yes, yes I have," she stated...

Both agents and Jonathon too, perked up with interest.

"That's Sinead, Sinead O'Connor! Has she been abducted? What a shame, I dig her tunes."

Both Grainger and Sullivan frowned. It was obvious that neither one of this kids knew this girl.

"I'm sorry Miss but no, it's not the singer. Thanks for your cooperation and your indulgence," Grainger said. "Please let us know if you do see her."

And with that the two men in suits turned and exited the café.

Once the door closed both Jonathon and Nancy let out a breath of relief. They had just lied to government agents, and it seemed to be easier than lying to their own parents. How cool was that?

END PART 11

12. Chapter 12

Even Stranger Things 12

***** **Families** *****

Jonathon Byers had just arrived at the Hawkins Police Station...accompanied by Nancy Wheeler, his girlfriend, by his side.

(Nancy marched into the station stride for stride with Jonathon. However, was he really her boyfriend?).

The both of them strolled through the front doors and, into the staging area of the Hawkins Police Department...they had both entered into a world unfamiliar (neither had been in the police station before, never in trouble).

Jonathon Byers looked to be a man on a mission. And after his (and Nancy's) weird encounter with the two men at the café, he had driven directly home. He had wanted to check on the wellbeing of his family, his mother, his brother, and too the rest of the youngsters who had stayed at his house the night before)

Still, when Jonathon arrived home he had found that none of the kids were there. They were all absent. Everyone was gone save his mom.

Joyce Byers hadn't seen her youngest son since earlier that morning. Will had spoken to his mother and told her that they (he and his friends) were headed to "Hawking Park" to play basketball.

Joyce had allowed him to go, even after he had informed her of the reason why El had wandered onto the back porch. A monster was looming about.

There was a creature roaming the woods, at night. And even though this scarred the living day-lights out of Joyce, what reason did she have to tell her young son that he couldn't go and play basketball with his friends? If Will wanted, then why shouldn't she let him?

Jonathon had divulged to his mother, that there were strange men in town, and they were looking for Eleven. This revelation had certainly

caused Joyce to become more aware. And too, it sicken her to think that the event (at Hawkins Laboratories), was not over...*(when was this shit going to end? When was the government going to be done with Hawkins...and too, let this town return to normacy?)*.

Joyce's oldest son hadn't meant to, but he had incidentally set his mother on edge, and his girlfriend too.

Nancy Wheeler was becoming more distressed over the idea that her younger brother may be in danger. And even all of them may be.

Will had informed his mother about the creature (the creature in the woods). The beast that El had sensed (and that revelation had rocked Joyce to her core. It had frightened her near out of her wits). However, what he hadn't told his mother was that he, and his friends were planning to go out there, go out and hunt this beast down. They were ready to confront it, just find its location, and then report back to Hopper.

Will Byers was ready to confront this creature. Still, he hadn't lied to his mother. Well, that wasn't totally accurate. He had withheld the truth, and wasn't lying just the same? Put four young boys together and they can come up with a very conniving story (secretive and selective). There were ways to elude honesty, but in reality, had Will lied... yes he had.

Anyway Will was no nest egg. A mother (or a father) can't protect their kids forever (lock them away. Shield them from the rest of the world for an eternity).

No, Joyce and Hopper both knew (just as all parents know), that you can't keep your children as shut-ins. A parent must sever the chains of control at some point. They can apply restrictions but they can't forbid their offspring from living, from having a life.

It was such a paradox, wasn't it? Still, some kind of action needed to be taken at this point, a plan, a formulation.

Joyce Byers, Jonathon and Nancy would all get into their vehicles. They would split up and (scour) the town looking for the boys (and too El). They didn't consider this an invasion of privacy, a violation of

rights. It was more like, a lion watching over its "Pride"...a mother tiger protecting her cubs.

Joyce Byers knew Will may become a little irritated with her...if she found him, tracked him down. She even knew that he might become embarrassed if she ran up and gave him the biggest hug (especially in front of his friends). He was such a small boy, and so, he may consider it rather annoying that she still doted on him so.

Joyce was thinking about this (as she slipped behind the steering wheel of her car), she thought about the fuss she might make if she found Will OK. However, she had another thought too. What if she found him not OK? What if her worse nightmare had come true?

She deliberated over the thought...what if she found Will and he was without harm? What if she found him pitch perfect? Would she thank God, of course she would. She would run up and give him the biggest "bear hug" that he'd ever had.

A mother's love was unconditional; even if she looked the fool. Her love was unedifying... and what if Will became annoyed...Still, she wasn't sure if she could control her emotions. What if he didn't hug her back...showed no emotion? She considered this and then thought...

"Screw that shit...if he becomes embarrassed I can't help it. I'm his mother. I can embarrass him any time I want."

***** **The Station** *****

Jim Hopper was sitting at his desk. He was still a little groggy from the night before.

He had gotten very little sleep (*but the sleep that he had gotten had been like the "sleep of the dead". A nuclear blast could have happened and Jim Hopper wouldn't have heard a thing.*

Now he was primed and ready. He was still tired but his circuits had been recharged. He had been so exhausted (when he had arrived home) that he had just fallen onto his bed...and within seconds become dead. He had slept so soundly that even with those few hours

it had allowed his batteries to become rejuvenated.

Hopper was sitting in his chair now, and sleep was utmost on his mind, but then he heard Flo's voice...

"Chief"

Hopper's eyes opened and he again was brought back into reality.

"What is it Flo?" he asked, and then added, "I think that I remember telling you at some point that mornings are for coffee and contemplation... and I am contemplating at the moment. I'm in an alternate universe, a surrogate reality... and you just blew my mind."

There was silence...and then

"Sorry about that chief, I remember Hopp, but it isn't morning. It's after 3pm on a Saturday afternoon as I recall. Or am I in a time-warp?"

Hopper thought about this...

"Oh yeah," He thought ... *"it is Saturday afternoon..."*

"So, what is it?"

"There are a couple of people in the lobby here to see you. Do you want to come out and see them, or would you prefer for me to send them back there to you?"

Hopper was thinking that he hated to get out of his chair. It was so comfortable, so relaxing. He made an impulse decision.

"Send them back. I'll talk to them in my office."

"Sure thing Hopp."

In ten seconds Hopp, with his feet still propped up on his desk saw Jonathon Byers and Nancy Wheeler standing right in front of him.

"Chief Hopper," Jonathon started, "there are things going on in town, things that maybe you know about, or maybe you don't. Still Nancy and I are here to clue you in on something that we know. There are

two guys roaming around town. Two guys in suits, and they seem to be searching for your daughter, El."

END PART 12

13. Chapter 13

Even Stranger Things 13

***** *The Nightmare of Hawkins* *****

Jim Hopper was in his police vehicle driving through the town. He was searching for Eleven. However, he knew also that if he found her, then he would likely find Mike, Will, Lucas and Dustin too.

Will's older brother, Jonathon, and Mike's older sister, Nancy, had come by the station and informed him that there were people in town, men in suits and they were asking questions. They also wanted to know the whereabouts of El, or if anyone had seen her.

Hopper knew these guys, Agents Grainger and Sullivan, and HIS question was, what were they still doing in town? The incident with the two teenagers hadn't warrant for the Feds to come in and assist. This was a local matter, and he could handle it himself, he and his deputies. It was curious that they were still here.

Anyway, Hopp had sensed at Millie's that this wasn't just about some alleged attack out in the woods, he knew better. He knew that the beast and El were tied together, linked somehow, and that the nightmare of Hawkins wasn't over.

"Why not hand the girl over to them, and maybe this would all go away?"

Hopp felt a bit of disgust with himself for even thinking that, considering it even for just the blink of an eye. However he couldn't help it, the idea had flashed through his brain without control.

It was then that he saw it, or them rather, Agents Grainger and Sullivan. The two were sitting at a café table outside, one with one of those big umbrella over the top. They were sitting there in their suits and dark sunglasses with drinks on the table. And in a town like Hawkins they stuck out like a sore thumbs.

Hopper wheeled in and parked his Blazer.

***** *The Eyes* *****

Hopper walked up to the table.

"Good day gentlemen, Agents Grainger and Sullivan. Having a little refreshments are we?"

He began the exchange politely, even though he wanted to get to the meat of the conversation.

"I though you guys were headed back home, on your way back to wherever it is you come from?"

Both men looked up at him.

"Hello Mr. Hooper, and yes we were, but some other matter has come up, and we were directed to remain in town."

Hopp noticed right away that Grainger had gotten his name wrong, and maybe it was by accident, or maybe not. Did it really mean anything? The idea did cross his mind.

"Weren't these guys trained to notice detail, schooled in seeing the little things that common individuals miss?"

It was a bit odd considering that his name-tag was plainly pinned to his shirt. Maybe it was just their way of showing him his place, his place in the pecking order, his position in the chain of command. He may be the sheriff, and this may be his town, but their authority was higher.

Anyway, Hopp chose to ignore it.

"No Chief we're in town looking for a girl, a young girl who's missing. Has anyone reported someone to you like that?"

Hopper knew that they were fishing for information. And that they were watching him intensely. These guys watched eyes, they watched for sideways glances, for twitchy fingers, sweaty palms, any clue or indication that someone was nervous. Still, at the same time they kept their own eyes shielded behind dark sunglasses.

Hopp knew...he knew the drill. He himself was well-versed in things of this matter. He had conducted a few interrogations and interviews

himself, and he retained his best poker-face.

"I haven't received any reports. Is it a local, or a tourist, some girl just passing through with her family?"

"It's neither. She's just a person of interest, and there may be people, certain individuals, willing to get her and take her away."

"Well I can't say that I can help you," Hopp said. "I do know all of the families in town and I haven't heard anything. If this girl's a stranger, and her folk or someone else hasn't filed a missing-persons report, then I have no idea that I should even be looking for someone."

Just at that moment there was a honk from a car driving by. All three men turned and saw a woman waving. Hopper recognized her, he recognized her immediately and waved back (it was Joyce Byers).

"Hey Betty, good to see you..."

"Who was that," Grainger asked?

"That was Betty, Betty Kramer, just a sweet local lady."

Hopp did his best to derail the indent. It seemed to have worked. Grainger returned his attention to the chief.

"And so you, you live here in town Hoop, or do have a place out in the countryside? We might need to contact you later."

Jim gave it a moment and then answered.

"I have a place in town. Well, it really isn't a permeant residence. It's more of an apartment at "Hawks Inn", a motel down the road where the owner keeps a room open for me. But, yeah I have a cabin, out past the edge of town. However, if you really need to contact me the best way is through dispatch. They can reach me by radio...anytime day or night."

"Thanks sheriff. I'm sure we'll talk again," Granger said.

"I'm sure we will," Hopper smiled.

***** *Games* *****

In a few minutes Hopper was at Joyce's. Her car was parked in front and the kids' bicycles were all spread across the lawn, but no one was outside. Before he could even enter her house Joyce met him on the front porch.

"Hopp what is it?"

"There are men in town looking for Eleven."

"Yeah, I know. Jonathon and Nancy told me. Hopp, why didn't you tell me that there was a creature out in the woods?"

"Honesty, it slipped my mind. When I came here earlier and we couldn't find El I forgot about it."

The worried woman looked at him.

"Well, I went searching for the boys and El. I found them and made them come back home. I saw you at the café, but before I noticed who you were with I had already honked my horn. I didn't stop, I just kept driving. What is it, what do they want?"

"They want her."

Standing at the side of the house, out of eyesight but not earshot, was Eleven. She had heard everything that had been said, and she knew that the people she loved, the ones she cared for, were in danger.

So these men in suits were looking for her, and they wanted to play games, mind games. Well, she'd learned how to play games from the best, from Brenner. She would give them a game that would really be an adventure, and it would start tonight.

END PART 13

14. Chapter 14

Even Stranger Things 14

***** *The Best-Laid Plans of Mice & Men* *****

It was dark...and there was a little chill in the air, but it wasn't bad. She had dressed for it.

El stood in the forest just outside the fence-line at the old Hawkins Laboratory. She was wearing a darkish gray, long sleeve sweatshirt, and a pair of old, slightly faded jeans. On her feet she wore a pair of old sneakers. She was well prepared for the cool, stygian night.

Eleven stood looking at the abandoned building. Although it had been only a few months prior (since the incident), the building looked old, dilapidated, as if it had aged twenty years. There were windows broken, bricks falling off the exterior, and weeds growing up (through the cracks in the cement parking lot). The structure itself looked lonely.

El felt sad, not because the building looked sad. In her mind she was desolate because the place was still standing. She was sad because it had not been destroyed.

...If Eleven had had a match in her pocket, at that moment, then she would have enjoyed setting fire to the structure, no hesitation.

The horrors, the things that had happened inside, the nightmares, the terror, and the punishment...No child should ever have to endure such fear in their young life.

A tear rolled down her cheek as she remembered the things that had happened, not only to her, but to others, her friends as well.

That's what she was sad about...and too, she was scared. She was afraid that the gate to *hell* had not been closed. She was frightened that the opening had not been sealed properly.

Eleven had ventured out into the night. There was a beast lurking about, a creature, and she meant to confront this entity (as well as

others). She was on a mission; she had a plan, and if things went accordingly, then everyone she knew in the town of Hawkins, would be safe by morning.

Eleven thought about Joyce Byers and Hopper, and she recalled what had been said on Joyce's front porch that afternoon.

The two had been discussing current events in their community. There were men in Hawkins, and they were looking for her. She knew what they wanted. They wanted to bring her back, back into the process, maybe not in this town, but there were many towns across the country, many places with secret labs, covert facilities.

These men wanted to lasso her, and then hand her over to people who would continue to study her, experiment. They wanted to turn her into a lab rabbit, so that when they said, "hop", she would hop. They wanted her to open doors for them, portals into the unknown.

Of course this was dangerous business, that's why they always operated in secret. If people were hurt, or even worse, if they died, then it could be covered up.

Sacrifices had to be made, and the families of workers who were injured, killed, or vanished, were always given the explanation that their loved one's had been in an accident. A car wreck, a plane crash, a shark attack, whatever was necessary, whatever fog they could create to keep their secrets safe, they would do. That was the arraignment. It was all for the greater good of humankind, right?

The earth had always been a world of secrets. Just because this was a new age, a new era, what difference did that make to keep knowledge away from others and only in the hands of a few. Power should be kept at a minimum. If everyone had power, then what advantage would power be?

Anyway, El remembered Hopper asking Joyce if she would allow El to stay at her house again. Those men, those agents, those guys in black, knew where he lived. *(he had actually given them the location to his cabin, and if Eleven returned, then they were surely to find out and then nab her)*. Her best cover, her best protection was to remain at the Byers' home.

Hopp would stay at his motel room in town that night. Come tomorrow, well, things would change and they would have to come up with a new plan.

Of course no phone calls could be made. The telephone system had been corrupted (the line to the Hawkins PD had been compromised, as so, many others). If Joyce needed to contact Hopper, then she would need to do it by radio. Her son, Will, had a radio just as all of his friends. She could reach him in that fashion. It was a good plan, it wasn't perfect, but it was the best that they could come up with at the time.

El, looked at the building (it was around 11:30), and there was a mist starting to grow in the air. She had been able to sneak away from Joyce without interrupting her sleep.

(it was only Joyce inside her home, Joyce and Will. Mike, Lucas, and Dustin, had all returned to their own homes, and too, Jonathon was absent. His Whereabouts were unknown to El)

Anyway, just at that moment a car pulled up to the front gate of Hawkins Laboratories, its headlights shone brightly through the fence and, onto a paved portion of the parking lot.

El watch as two men exited the vehicle, her eyes were wide. They approached the gate, their forms silhouetted against the fence by the cars headlights, and within a minute, beams of light illuminated from their hands, the rays streaming through the fog of the night. They were using flashlights to search for her.

Eleven heard one of them say something about splitting up, and casing the perimeter. She smiled at this. This night might end up a success after all, even better than she had planned.

El stayed still, she held her position. She was sure that the man approaching on her side would see her (but then, she wanted him to)

When his light lit upon and flashed onto her face that's when she would take flight. And then he would pursue her, of course he would. And from there, she would see what happened.

END PART 14

15. Chapter 15

Even Stranger Things 15

***** *A Girlie Alliance* *****

The night was dark...but a few hours earlier...

After the boys had left Will's house, one of them had met up with Maxine and then the two had joined the group.

The idea had been to search the forest in an attempt to find the creature which was lurking out in the woods (a beast which may be gallivanting around Rowan County).

Their adventure had not been a success. They had found nothing, no sign of any monster, no indication that there was a terror ready to eat people, to devour them without leaving a morsel. Nope, they had started to think that maybe they would have had more excitement visiting the old haunted house.

Anyway, Will's mom had found them. She was in her car searching whenever she'd come across the boys and girls cruising through town. She had ordered her youngest son to return home. And with that, he and his friends had given up the search. They had all returned to Will's, their whole Saturday blown, achieving nothing. Max had even returned with them.

...Now, an hour later, after El had overheard Joyce and Hopper's conversation on the porch, she had motioned Maxine aside. There was something that she wanted to ask.

For a time El had been a little peeved with Maxine Mayfield. The redheaded girl seemed to be moving in on her territory (Mike). However, she had come to find that that wasn't true.

Max, being somewhat of a tomboy herself. She was new in town and had gravitated to the kids in school that held her same interest.

Inserting one's self into a group of lifelong friends, especially all boys, was a tough nut to crack. However, both girls had done it. They had that in

common.

Now, they had become friends, or rather let's just say, friendlier.

Anyway, El had asked Max for a favor. She had requested that the redhead call the "Hawk Inn" motel, later that night, at around 11:06 PM. She told Maxine to ask for Agents Grainger and Sullivan. She was then instructed to tell them (anonymously) that she had seen the girl in their picture, and that they could find her wondering around the old Hawkins Laboratory building.

Now, at this point...as El watched the two figures (the two men in suits who had come to the old lab building), she noticed that they had split up. They had and begun searching for her in separate directions. She knew that Maxine had done her job, and she had done it well. She had been convincing (maybe they could become better friends after this?). The plan had worked perfectly. Well, at least up to this point.

So, these guys thought that they were going to be able to catch her, snag their desire and then be able to return home in the morning for eggos (*Eleven thought that everybody loved eggos at this time. She might have been a little unhappy if she had known that that wasn't the case*). Anyway...

(Arrogance is a human fault, a fault that maybe we will never outgrow)

El watched as one of the men walked around to her side of the fence. He was stumbling a bit. His flashlight pointed out into the wood rather than onto the ground where he was walking. She knew that if she didn't hide, then he would see her, and of course, give chase. That is exactly what she wanted. She wanted that to happen.

Eleven wanted to get them away from their vehicle (as far away as she could). In this fashion they couldn't return, run back to their car and radio for help. She wanted that. She wanted this night to be on her terms. And, she was only moments away from its achievement. Well, that's what she was hoping.

***** *The Night is Dark, and Full of Terrors* *****

It was only a minute before Agent Grainger spotted Eleven hiding in the woods. He called to his associate for assistance.

El began to run. Her idea was to put space between them, herself and her pursuer(s). She could have easily outrun the man in the suit (she was already witness to his heavy breathing), but her plan was not to outrun these fellows. Her thought was to stay just far enough ahead so that Grainger's spotlight only lit onto the bottoms of her sneakers.

The forest was growing darker now, the night colder. That was when she heard the agent announce.

"Stop girl, you can't outrun me!"

El knew that was bullshit, they both knew it. However, Grainger knew that he had to respond with something.

"My partner's coming; you can't get away from both of us...might as well stop, stop and sit still!"

That was true. Well at least part of it. His partner was coming. She could hear two people now, two individuals gasping for fresh air to fill their lungs. Eluding these guys would have been simple, a piece of cake. They were out of their element and she was in hers.

Eleven wasn't confined behind a tall fence now. She wasn't enclosed within four walls, like with Brenner. There were places she could go, hide, room to escape, if she so wished.

Eleven ran for a while and then she came to an abrupt stop. She hauled just as Agent Grainger had spoken for her to do earlier. She planted her sneakers firmly into the night soil, and then she turned. She turned around to face him.

Grainger was stunned. He nearly fell over himself at this change in events. He froze several feet away from her, gathering his wits and composure.

"That's right little lady. Things are going to be alright," he said. He put a hand out just as if he were trying to calm a dog, a wild animal.

El stood there, arms to her side, her hands balled into fists, the

expression on her face unreadable. Not that Grainger could see much in the dimness of his flashlight.

Sullivan hadn't caught up to them yet, but when he did Grainger heard his partner come to a stop a few feet behind him. That's when the agent closest to El slightly turned his head to the side, and with a sheepish grin he spoke...

"We got her partner. We got the crown jewel. You and me are each gonna get a few weeks' vacation after this. I'm thinking the Bahamas, and all those hard bodied females lying on the beach. Yeah, just waiting for us to spread the suntan lotion."

Just at that moment there came a commotion behind him. The man turned and in the semi-darkness he noticed that his friend wasn't standing, but rather he'd sunken into a hole, a hole in the ground about two feet wide, and he was already in to his chest

"Graing help me," he called!

Even in the darkness Agent Grainger could see his friend's eyes wide. They were requesting, no screaming, for help. He raced over to him. He grabbed Sullivan beneath his armpits. The struggles of each could be heard clearly by El, they plight apparent.

Grainger pulled with all of his might, his effort achieving some success, but only for about two seconds. Sullivan was still sinking. He was going lower and lower into the hole. And with each inch downward, his eyes got bigger, and the sounds coming from his mouth more desperate. It was going to be a losing battle, he knew. It registered on his face. And that is the moment whenever a person's life flashes before their eyes.

END PART 15

16. Chapter 16

Even Stranger Things 16

******Grainger & Sullivan******

Agent Grainger was fighting to pull his friend out of a hole in the forest. However, he was not gaining much progress for his efforts. Sullivan was still sinking deeper and deeper into the ground. It seemed so strange, so surreal.

"Somewhere in the back of Grainger's mind it occurred to him that this was the same area that he had just crossed a moment ago, and it hadn't felt soggy or mushy...why had the ground opened up now?"

He didn't have the time to dwell on the question. All of the thoughts in his brain were now being funneled towards saving his partner. Any ideas about catching the girl had vanished. His mind was focused on a rescue mission.

There were hundreds of thoughts were running through Grainger's head, almost all at once. He was in a squat position and he was using all of his strength to wrestle his friend from the deep, dark abyss. He should have been well able to pull him out. However, there was something preventing it. Maybe it was a tree root, or his belt was caught on something? Still, the favor seemed lie in the advantage of the hole, it was almost like it was trying to swallow him up, suck him down. That was when Sullivan said something. It was a bit confusing, but at the same time it made sense. And, his announcement shook Grainger to his core.

"It's got me," he said. "It's got me and it's pulling me down."

"What the hell! What was he talking about?"

That thought zipped through Grainger's brain like an express train going two-hundred miles an hour. Was there something down there, and was it pulling on Sully, trying to drag him under? That would explain why he was unable to free his friend. There was an opposite force defying his attempts.

In that instant things changed. At that moment Grainger's thoughts caved-in to an alternate reality. Was there a creature down there?

They had been sent to Hawkins to investigate something unnatural, but possibly could it be true? Could there be something really living out in the woods of this town? And, did this beast, this monster have a hold of his friend now? Grainger wasn't sure, but it did seem like he was involved in a battle of tug-of-war?

Just at that moment Sullivan slipped from his grasp. Grainger's arms emptied and he saw his friend's face slide into the darkness. For an instant, he saw his friend's eyes grow bigger around, and his mouth fell open, but nothing came out. And then he was gone.

It had been a battle of wills, a battle of will and strength, and he had lost. His vice grip on Sully had been so tight that when it released he fell off balance. Grainger flipped, tumbled and rolled. Still at the same time he was reaching for his weapon.

In a fraction of a second he stood back over the hole. He peered into its murky, inky depths, but he could see nothing. It was void, even darker than the open sky above.

He thought about shooting into the hole, but if he did then he risked the chance of shooting his friend. He wanted to pull the trigger (and emptying his weapon into the nothingness), but his finger stopped.

"Sully was down there. What if he was down just far enough that he couldn't see him? It may happen that he'd be pumping bullets into his own friend?"

He stayed his finger. Then reality hit...

"The Girl, That Girl, that's why she'd stopped, she knew. She knew that there was a tunnel here, a pit carved into the ground. She had planned it, planned for this to happen. It had been a trap!"

Grainger's mind instantly turned to anger and rage.

"She'd done this, she was responsible"

The Agent spun around quickly, he was ready to shoot. He was ready

to deliver a killing projectile into any threat that may be coming at him.

However, there was no threat coming, nothing charging him, and to his amazement he witnessed something that he hadn't expected, the girl was still there.

Eleven had remained in the same spot as she had before. She hadn't bolted.

***** ***Mistaken Assumptions*** *****

Eleven stood there, in front of Grainger, as frozen as she'd had been just before Sullivan had fell into the hole.

"You, you little school girl. Is my friend dead? Did you command one of your beasts to take him down, drag him to hell? No wonder they had you locked-up. You're a monster, a beast, a demon who controls other demons. You're a danger to everything and everybody. I was told that if we found you, we were to bring you back alive, but not at the risk of our own."

There was a pause, and then Eleven spoke.

"Well, that was very human of them to tell you that," she said, a bit sarcastically.

It was the first time Grainger had heard the girl speak. And her voice was not that of a demon, but of a little girl. Still, he would not be fooled by trickery.

"Tell me...give me one good reason not to put a bullet right through your skull?"

Grainger was wrong, he was wrong in his analysis of Eleven. She knew it even if he did not. Still, there was no time for them to sit and debate over theories and the realities of life.

She looked over at him. He had no idea that she hadn't caused the ground to open up, unfurl under his friend. El was just as confused about what had happened as he. However, she did have an idea, she could take a good guess at what she thought was guilty of the deed, a

Demogorgon, a minion that was being controlled, not by her, but by an Illithid (Mind Flayer).

Agents Grainger and Sullivan had stumbled into something that was beyond their comprehension. It was beyond the reality of most people.

Their employer hadn't done them any favors by giving them this assignment, this mission to seek out answers to the strange things still happening in Hawkins (maybe they themselves didn't know the gravity of the situation?).

Still, Eleven didn't care about that. She was sorry that Grainger's friend had gotten sucked underground by a Demogorgon, it was distressing. However, she couldn't, no wouldn't, stand there and let him shoot her. Nor would she allow him to hurt any of her friends.

El became aware of moisture running down her jawline, and it was trickling down her neck. She reached up and felt it, it was warm. Something was about to happen.

END PART 16

17. Chapter 17

Even Stranger Things 17

Conclusion of this story. Thanks for reading.

***** **Backstory** *****

Eleven walked through the woods as if she had no fear, as if there was nothing to be afraid of. She walked as though she had complete command over her surroundings, and she did.

Only a few feet now, only a few steps more and she would again be on the Byers' back porch (*and then, her idea was to sneak inside through the back door, as quietly as she'd done when sneaking out*).

Eleven looked up...she looked up into the dark sky above. She could see stars, those little flickers of light beyond the forest canopy. They really were beautiful. She had read in books how people used to navigate by them, tell time by their movements, but she couldn't do that.

For all of her talents, for all of her skills and abilities, Eleven had never been pushed to consider the stars. To think about things that might be out there, in the universe (*there were other students at Hawkins Labs whose focus it was to do that*). El herself, had always been instructed to concentrate on what was down, down underground.

Dr. Bennett had told her many times that she was "special" that she was "gifted" and that she meant so much to him. Still, he had also kept her locked away like a prisoner in a box.

In her room there'd been no windows, no openings to look out. She barely remembered the stars, and much of her time spent in that room she had passed by reading and thinking about the "Upside-Down". She never really knew if it was morning or night (living below ground will do that to a person...their only reference being a single door leading to the outside world, one solitary portal).

Eleven hardly even remembered going outside (While she was held captive at the lab), and the few times she had been allowed to go it had always been with an escort, and, it had always been daytime.

(Darkness and confinement to Eleven had been an everyday event...It was what she knew, what she'd become accustomed to)

Anyway, that was all in her past now. Her world had opened up, and, at this very moment, she was only steps away from returning to the Byers' home. In about ten seconds she would slip into the house (quietly and cautiously) and return to Joyce's room. Joyce was sleeping in Johnathon's bedroom, since he was gone, and Will was sleeping in his own room. Eleven opened the door and eased her way in.

***** ***The Instincts of a Mother*** *****

Eleven slipped inside the Byers' residence. She was quiet, so quiet that even a sound detector wouldn't have picked up her footsteps. However, a sound detector is not a mother. Joyce Byers immediately sat up from the couch.

"El where have you been, I've been worried sick?"

The older lady stood up and rushed over to the girl. She slipped down to her knees and took Eleven by the shoulders.

"Are you OK...nothing hurt, nothing done to you? You didn't get into any danger?"

Joyce's eyes were wide. She pulled the child in tight to her. She squeezed, giving El a big hug. Her arms slipped around the girl. Eleven could feel her hands exploring across her back. She was searching, combing for injuries. She found none.

"...I'm fine Miss Byers. I just went for a walk."

Eleven spoke this as calmly and as easing as possible. She did not want to upset or alarm the woman.

Joyce pulled back and looked at her.

"First of all call me Joyce," she said, "and secondly, you can't keep doing this! You are my responsibility. Maybe you don't understand this but while you're here, under my roof, I'm in charge of your safety. If Hopper ever found out..." Joyce shuddered to think, "well, let's not go there..."

There was a moment of hesitation. The older woman looking into the young girl's dark eyes.

"Honey, there's a creature out there, something out in those woods. Some kind of beast or animal, and we don't know what it is or what it wants. All we know is that people aren't safe out there, especially at night. They shouldn't be alone, and that goes double for you."

At that moment Joyce could see scratches on Eleven's face...there was a bit of blood trickling down her jawline.

"I thought that you said that you just went for a walk?"

El wasn't used to lying, but she had learned to do so once she'd become aware that the people at the labs, the folk she'd thought that she could trust, had been lying to her for a long time. She realized that lying can sometimes be useful. Especially if you were doing it to guard someone. And, in this case, she wasn't totally lying, just omitting some of the truth. Still, Joyce seemed to be questioning her story.

"I did. I was walking," she said.

"Then why is there blood on your face?"

***** *Yesterday's Deeds* *****

Sometime earlier...

El, was back on her way to the Byers' house. She was tired, the day had been long, long and eventful. However, now she felt somewhat at ease, as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. She could get a good night's sleep.

Walking back towards the Byers' residence El thought about what had transpired only a few moments ago. She remembered standing there

face to face with Agent Grainger. He had pulled his weapon and had it pointed straight at her.

Eleven couldn't see his eyes, but she didn't have to, she knew the look. She knew what she would find if she could see them. There would be murder, hatred. Grainger was looking to kill something. The man was threatening to shoot her because he thought that she was responsible for his partner's disappearance, and he was shouting for her to bring him back.

"I had nothing to do with that," she said.

Eleven remained calm, and she tried to sound as convincing as possible. However, Grainger was still feverishly angry; a red tinge illuminated his face. She knew that he was only a slight touch away from pulling the trigger. However she did not twitch, she did not flicker. She remained confident and composed.

Eleven wasn't completely familiar with all of her powers. There were convincingly some that she did not fully understand. Still, there were some that she knew well how to control, and she knew that she wouldn't die tonight. If Grainger shot...then there were things that she to do to avoid his bullet. Still, she held some empathy towards the man. She considered the idea, what if someone or something had done something to one of her friends? Will, Dustin, Lucas or Mike, especially Mike, wouldn't she feel enraged? That question answered itself...

It took only a millisecond for these thoughts to speed through her brain, and yet, in that instant, Grainger made a sound that she hadn't expected. Watching him, he fell to the ground, like something had grabbed him from behind. there was something wrapped around his legs and it was pulling him backwards, towards the abyss. He was screaming, shouting for her to help. She could still remember his shouts now, but she had done nothing, she had not responded.

Agent Grainger had been sucked under. He had disappeared down the same hole that his partner had fallen into. Some creature, some manifestation had taken him down, brought him into the dark. She watched as the hole then had closed up. It sealed itself off. The beast had been satisfied with its catch for the night. Eleven turned and

began walking back home.

Now she was looking down into Joyce's face.

Had she lied to the woman, not really, the scratches on her face were from the branches across her path as she was running from Grainger and Sullivan. The night was over. The Demogorgon had pulled its two victims down into oblivion, their fate...their torture, unknown. Eleven wouldn't let herself think about it.

She was sorry that it had happened, yet still she had shed no tear. Tears were for friends, family and people we love. Those are the folk we cry for. There may be a bit of grief, a bit of sorrow for the two agents, but that was all.

Looking into Joyce's face she spoke.

"I'm a little tired, can we go to sleep now?"

END